

# Visiting Hours

Monday—Saturday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.  
Sunday, noon to 5:00 p.m.  
Open Memorial Day, July 4, Labor Day,  
and Columbus Day.  
Hours subject to change without notice.  
Admission charged.

A receipt from the Ephrata Cloister is good toward a reduced adult admission at any of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) historic sites and museums listed in the *Pennsylvania Trail of History*® brochure and at any of the Museum Council of Lancaster County member institutions. Free unlimited visits to all PHMC historic sites and museums are available through membership in the Pennsylvania Heritage Society. For information, inquire at the Visitor Center, or telephone (717) 733-6600.

## Special Events

Throughout the year, Ephrata Cloister offers a range of special programs which highlight the history of this early American community. **Charter Day** on the second Sunday of March commemorates the founding of Pennsylvania. Admission is free. **The Ephrata Cloister Chorus** presents selections from early Ephrata during several concerts. **Lantern Tours** are given on selected evenings in late December. Several programs require advance reservations. For more details about these and other programs, contact Ephrata Cloister and request the annual Calendar of Events or visit [www.ephratacloister.org](http://www.ephratacloister.org).



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and with generous support from  
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## Ephrata Cloister Associates

632 West Main Street  
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(717) 733-6600

[www.ephratacloister.org](http://www.ephratacloister.org)

*Individuals with disabilities who need special assistance or accommodation should telephone the historic site in advance to discuss their needs. Persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired and who wish to contact a hearing person via Text Telephone may use the PA Relay Center at 1-800-654-5984.*



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# Ephrata Cloister



## Visitor Guide



1. Begin your Ephrata Cloister experience at the **Visitor Center**, where you can preview the introductory exhibit and video, purchase admission tickets, and learn about special events. In this modern building you'll find restrooms, a water fountain, and information about visiting the historic Lancaster County countryside.

2. **Conrad Beissel's House\*** may be among several of the original buildings surviving at the site. Between his arrival here in 1732 and his death in 1768, Beissel moved about six times. In the late 1740s, the Brotherhood built a residence for him located between Bethania (Brothers' House) and Saron (Sisters' House), where he could study and write in private, conduct gatherings, and welcome guests.



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3. **Saron (Sisters' House)\*** was constructed in 1743 for Householder couples who left their dwellings to live as celibate Brothers and Sisters. It was a brief experiment, and after the husbands and wives returned to their farmsteads, the building was remodeled to accommodate the Sisterhood. Each of the building's three main floors contains a kitchen, a room for eating, two common workrooms, and about twelve sleeping chambers, one for each Sister. For nearly fifteen years, Mother Maria Eicher directed the Sisters' daily duties and maintained their independence from the Brotherhood. After the death of the last Sister in 1813, the building was divided into apartments and rented to church members.



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4. **The Saal (Meeting-house)\*** is a *Fachwerk*, or half-timbered building, constructed in 1741 as a worship hall for Householders. After the Sister-

hood moved into the adjoining building, they took over this Meetinghouse. Here, Sisters worshiped each midnight while the Brothers gathered in their own Saal. The entire congregation used the Meetinghouse on Mount Zion for Saturday worship. The services in each of the Meetinghouses included scripture readings, lessons, and music. Special fellowship gatherings, called Love Feasts, celebrated the coming of Christ with the ceremonial washing of feet, a meal, and the Eucharist with bread and wine. As the Solitary population declined in the 1770s, the Householders took a more active part in daily work. They probably added the stone kitchen to the rear of the building as a place to prepare their Love Feast meals.

5. **A Weaver's House\*** contained work for all members of the Ephrata community. Flax, the source of linen, was planted by the Brothers, and everyone helped to harvest and clean the fiber. Both Brothers and Sisters spun linen thread while the weaving of cloth was a male occupation. Seamstresses and tailors among the community sewed the white monastic robes.



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6. **The Academy\*** was opened by the Householders in 1837 as a private school for their children and those of the area. The tradition of teaching school at Ephrata dates to the mid-eighteenth-century when Brother Obed (Ludwig Hocker) conducted lessons for neighborhood children. Most of the teaching focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic. In the early 1840s, the enterprising teacher Joseph Wiggins also offered chemistry, measuring, surveying, and astronomy. By the mid-nineteenth-century, the building had become a public school and served several generations of students until it closed in 1926.

7. **God's Acre\*** is the burial ground for Conrad Beissel, the Solitary, and Householders, although not every grave retains its marker. The earliest marked grave is 1767 and the last burial took place here in 1961, after which the graveyard was no longer used. The surrounding stone wall is a 1950s reconstruction of the original.

8. **The Bakery\*** was likely a busy place when in operation. In eighteenth-century Ephrata, each individual consumed about a pound of bread daily. Loaves of bread each weighed about four pounds. After mixing the ingredients in large wooden boxes, the dough was left to rise for several hours, then divided into loaves, and set to rise in rye straw baskets. Meanwhile, a fire burned inside the dome-shaped oven, heating the brick. When the oven temperature was correct, the coal and ash from the fire were scraped out, and the bread placed inside using long-handled peels. Brother Amos (Jan Mayle) served as the community's baker for many years, and visitors reported that he made a delicious bread.



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Above the bakery is an area that served several purposes during the eighteenth-century. It may have been a work space or even a storage area. It could have also been a place to distribute food or clothing to individuals in need. Among those cared for by the community were several widows, such as Chritiana Hohn, who moved into the community after the death of her husband. Other non-celibate residents of the site included poor individuals, and for brief periods, newly-arrived Householders who had not yet established their own homes. By the late 1790s, this area may have been used as a residence by the few remaining Solitary.

9. **The Saron Bake Oven\*** was constructed in the early 1820s, likely to serve the needs of the few residents renting space in Saron during the later years of the community.

10. **The Physician's House\*** probably contained a cupboard holding a few books and homemade herbal remedies, along with a bed for the sick. Brother Gideon (Christian Eckstein) and later Samuel Eckerlin both called themselves "practitioners in physic," or doctors. Their training was minimal, and their cures may or may not have helped those in distress. Eighteenth-century visitors to the community observed that the members were thin and pale, but seemed healthy. Like most early settlers in America, Cloister residents had poor sanitation and did not bathe often. Many more necessities or outhouses would have stood throughout the community.



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11. **The Small Bake House\*** undoubtedly served as a place for seasonal chores such as candle-making, soap-making, besides the regular routine of laundry.

12. **Two eighteenth-century structures\*** were discovered by archaeologists working at this site between 1994 and 1998. The largest was built of posts placed in the ground while a stone foundation survived for the small structure. There are several possible interpretations for these previously unknown structures, including the suggestion that these may have been the location of Kedar, the first dormitory built at Ephrata in 1735, and the Prayer House that was attached to Kedar from 1737 until 1741.

13. **Bethania (Brothers' House)\*** was built in 1746 and stood until 1908. The impressive four-story building had kitchens, eating areas, work rooms, and sleeping chambers much like the Saron (Sisters' House). Archaeological evidence also suggests that the Brotherhood printing operation was carried on inside Bethania. After finishing its construction, the Brotherhood found they had gathered enough materials to construct an

\*original feature

For additional information,



adjoining Saal (Meetinghouse), which was demolished about 1855. The front door of this Saal faced the Cocalico Creek. A small structure, perhaps a workshop, stood between the Saal and the creek.

**14. The Printing Office\*** of the Brotherhood was first established in a building on Mount Zion, then moved to Bethania (Brothers' House) next door but may have looked similar to the exhibit in this building. The west end of this structure was

built sometime in the eighteenth-century. An addition to the east about 1810, offered member Able Witwer more space and light to operate a clockmaking shop.



**15. The Cocalico Creek and the Spring\*** offered a constant source of cool, fresh water, attracting animals and people alike. A number of Native American tools found at Ephrata suggest this land was a prime hunting spot for the first human inhabitants of the region. When Conrad Beissel arrived in 1732, he chose to live near the spring. Anna and Maria Eicher, the first Sisters, lived in a small house across the creek on land later owned by their father, Householder Daniel Eicher. New members were received into the community with the right of baptism, performed in the creek. About a mile downstream the Brothers operated a water-powered saw mill, grain mill, paper mill, fulling mill, and oil mill. They eventually built a second paper mill about 500 yards upstream from this spot.



**16. The Carpenter's House\*** is typical of the earliest homes in Ephrata. Conrad Beissel originally sought to lead the life of a hermit in a cabin similar to this one. Even after the large dormitories were constructed for the Brothers and Sisters, some Solitary members

chose to live by themselves or in smaller groups outside the communal houses. Members of the Brotherhood, such as Brother Sealthiel (Sigmund Landert) and Brother Kenan (Jacob Funk), were skilled carpenters who not only built structures but also made furniture for the community's use.

**17. The Amphitheater**, constructed in the 1970s, is used today for special programs.

**18. The Maintenance Barn**, constructed in the 1960s, provides workspace for the site staff. (Not open to the public.)

**19. The Mount Zion Buildings\*** were constructed by the Brotherhood between 1738 and 1745 and included both a dormitory and a Saal (Meetinghouse). The Brothers lived here only until 1745, when they moved back to the building

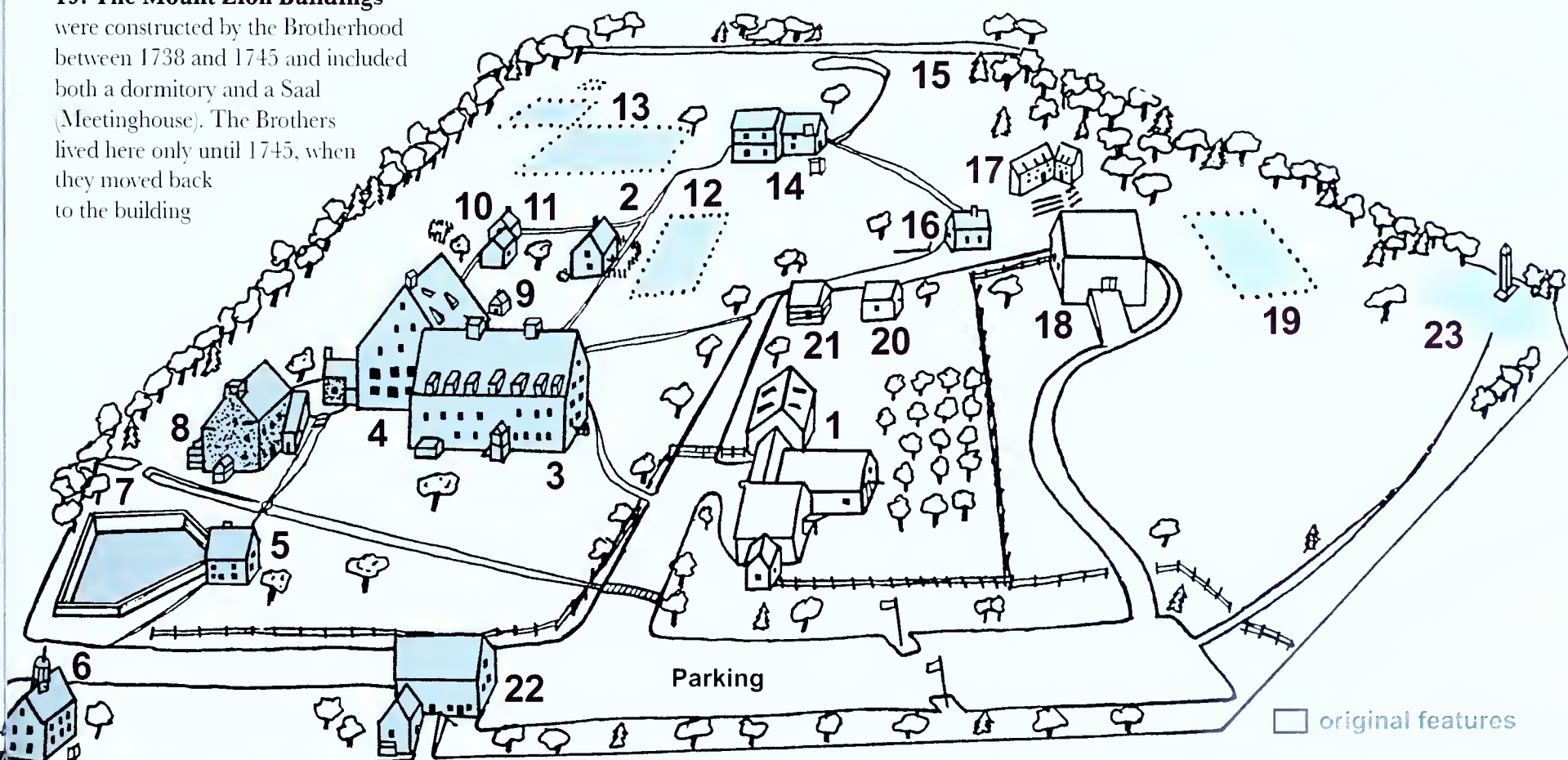
called Kedar for a year until a new Brothers' House was built near the creek. The buildings on Mount Zion then served as a refuge for the poor and widows, and a Meetinghouse for the entire Ephrata community. In 1764, a group of dissenting Brothers who had left Ephrata twenty years earlier returned and took up residence in some of the buildings on Mount Zion, leading to tensions within the community during the latter part of the eighteenth-century. During the Revolutionary War, some of the Mount Zion buildings served as a hospital for American soldiers.

**20. The Workshop** once stood several miles away and was moved to the historic site in the early 1940s. Its architecture is similar to other buildings constructed by the Pennsylvania Germans in the region. The building houses the exhibit "Heirs to a Legacy: the Married Congregation at Ephrata."

**21. The Stable** is a reconstruction of the original building which once stood on this site. Tax records from the mid-eighteenth-century indicate the community owned one or two horses and a few cattle. Agriculture was an important activity of the Brotherhood, who grew much of the community's food supply.

**22. Shady Nook Farm\*** was located in the surviving historic area of the Ephrata Cloister and was home to some of the last members of the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church at Ephrata. The farmhouse stood next to the present Visitor Center. The barn, which once housed animals and equipment, is now **The Museum Store** at Ephrata Cloister, where you'll find a selection of books, postcards, hand-crafted gifts, and items reflecting the heritage of Ephrata Cloister and the area.

**23. Mount Zion Cemetery\***, containing the graves of several early Ephrata members, is reached by a path at the end of the parking area. A large monument marks the traditional location of the mass grave of Revolutionary War soldiers who died in the temporary hospital established at Ephrata during the winter of 1777-1778. When the monument was dedicated in 1902, legend said that hundreds of soldiers died at the Cloister. Official records, however, account for about sixty men who did not survive the winter. The land beyond the rail fence, adjacent to the cemetery, was called Fairview Farm in the late 1880s. The farmhouse, home of some of the last members of the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church at Ephrata, stood just beyond the fence.





Imagine—

just for a moment—that several decades of warfare has left your life in turmoil. You are in debt and many around you are homeless and starving. Your own faith is under attack from the government. What would you do? What could you do?



### This is the chaotic world

into which Conrad Beissel was born in 1691 in Elberbach, Germany. At the age of 24, Beissel experienced a spiritual awakening. No longer was

he satisfied with the trappings and distractions of daily life. Instead, he sought inner peace by shunning worldly ways. In 1720, he joined thousands of German, Swiss, Dutch, and French Protestants and escaped religious persecution by journeying to Pennsylvania.

After spending twelve years in Pennsylvania, some of it as a leader in a local Brethren congregation, Beissel sought solitude in the forest in 1732. His desire for a quiet home free from distractions allowed him to continue on his spiritual pilgrimage to join God in Heaven. Two issues remained important to Beissel: Saturday was the main day for worship, and a desire to unite with God left no room for earthly marriage.

Others soon followed the charismatic Beissel to his wilderness retreat. Like Beissel, these first builders of Ephrata sought an escape from worldliness and the promise of a better world yet to come. By 1750, Ephrata numbered nearly eighty celibate Brothers and Sisters known jointly as the Solitary. At the same time, families known as Householders, numbering about 200, lived on nearby farms. These husbands and wives chose Beissel as their spiritual leader but were unwilling to make the sacrifices he demanded of the Solitary. The Householders contributed funds, products, and assistance to support the Brothers and Sisters.

Among the solitary, daily life was regimented and filled with discipline for body and mind. Meager diets, brief periods of rest, long hours of work, and time for private meditation were embraced by members in their quest to regain the purity of Adam and Eve and thus prepare them to enter Paradise. The Solitary lived, worked, and worshipped in impressive Germanic-style buildings, and engaged in farming, milling, and domestic work.



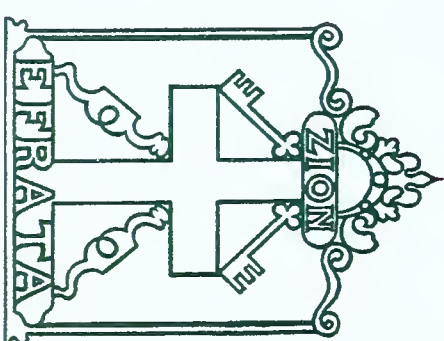
The Brotherhood operated a printing press for nearly fifty years, beginning in 1743. The Brothers' most ambitious work was the translation and publication of the 1500-page *Martyrs' Mirror* for the Mennonites, the largest book printed in colonial America.

Musical composition and the German calligraphic writing called *Fraktur* were viewed by the members as a discipline for both body and soul. Beissel and his followers wrote and performed hymns, which required many hours of practice. Both Brothers and Sisters also engaged in the creation of magnificent hand-illuminated books and inscriptions.

The community became known for its charity, helping new settlers to build houses, caring for the poor and elderly, operating a school for area children, and offering guests free lodging. During the winter of 1777–1778 the Cloister was the site of a Revolutionary War military hospital.

The death of Conrad Beissel in 1768, and a lack of interest in the monastic life among a younger generation, led to the community's

decline. In 1813, the last celibate member died, leaving the Householders to maintain the property and the faith. Forming the German Seventh-Day Baptist Church, Householders continued to live and worship at Ephrata until 1934. Seven years later, in 1941, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) acquired the remnants of the historic site and initiated an intensive program of restoration and interpretation.



Today, only a fraction of Ephrata Cloister's eighteenth-century heritage survives. Yet, the story of a people anticipating Paradise by undertaking a spiritual pilgrimage to unite with God remains. We may look upon the actions of these pioneers as different from ones we might choose for ourselves, but the desire for a better life exists within everyone. Ephrata is one expression of that desire.

